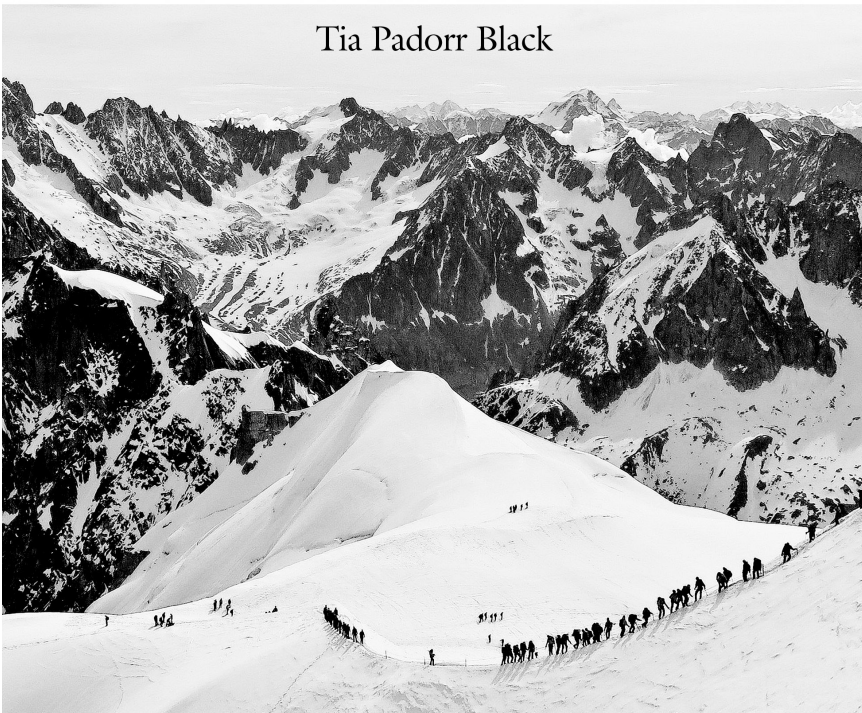


Worldviews in Literature

An Anthology

Tia Padorr Black



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A worldview will need to rise to the fore that sees nature, other nations, and our own neighbors not as adversaries, but rather as partners in a grand project of mutual reinvention.

Naomi Klein, environmentalist
This Changes Everything

East and West are ever in search of each other... the right hand, which wields the sword, has need of the left, which holds the shield of safety.

Rabindranath Tagore
Creative Unity

Table of Contents



<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Introduction: World Literature and the Humanities</i>	xiii
I: Short Fiction from the East	1
Rabindranath Tagore: Themes and Worldview	2
Tagore and Kosambi: Bengal Renaissance Values	6
Rabindranath Tagore / “Exercise Book”	9
Rabindranath Tagore / “Profit and Loss”	14
Rabindranath Tagore / “The Postmaster”	20
Rabindranath Tagore / “Fury Appeased”	25
Rabindranath Tagore / “The Conclusion”	33
Rabindranath Tagore / “The Wife’s Letter”	48
Rabindranath Tagore essay / “East and West”	63
II. Drama from the East	73
Dharmanand Kosambi: Themes and Worldview	74
Dharmanand Kosambi / <i>Bodhisattva: A Play 1949</i> / Acts I-IV	79
III. Short Fiction from the West	125
Anton Chekhov: Themes and Worldview	126
Anton Chekhov / “Vanka”	131
Anton Chekhov / “Sleepy”	135
Anton Chekhov / “Anyuta”	141
Anton Chekhov / “Misery”	145
Anton Chekhov / “Home”	150
Anton Chekhov / “Gooseberries”	159
Anton Chekhov / “Betrothed”	169

IV. World Poets East and West	187
Rabindranath Tagore: Themes / Worldview / Context	188
Rabindranath Tagore / “ <i>Flute Music</i> ”	192
Rabindranath Tagore / “ <i>Verse 35 from Gitanjali</i> ”	195
Nathalie Handal: Themes / Worldview / Context	196
Nathalie Handal Interview: “<i>Poetic Journeys</i>”	199
Nathalie Handal: <i>Poet in Andalucía: Naming the Journey of Return</i>	202
Nathalie Handal / “ <i>The Courtyard of Colegiata del Salvador</i> ”	207
Nathalie Handal / “ <i>The Thing about Feathers</i> ”	208
Nathalie Handal / “ <i>The Book of Toledo</i> ”	210
Pak Chaesam, Jon Pineda, Xuân Quỳnh, and Diana Der-Hovanesian:	
Themes / Worldview / Context	212
Pak Chaesam / “ <i>The Road Back</i> ”	219
Jon Pineda / “ <i>My Sister Who Died Young Takes Up the Task</i> ”	220
Xuân Quỳnh / “ <i>The Blue Flower</i> ”	221
Diana Der-Hovanesian / “ <i>Two Voices</i> ”	223
Gabriela Mistral: Themes / Worldview / Context	225
Mistral and Heritage: Fortune and Loss in the Poem “<i>Riches</i>”	229
Gabriela Mistral / “ <i>Riches</i> ”	231
Gabriela Mistral / “ <i>The Rose</i> ”	232
Joan Naviyuk Kane: Themes / Worldview / Context	233
Joan Naviyuk Kane Interview: “<i>Poems against Loss</i>”	235
Joan Naviyuk Kane: Innuity Values for Survival in <i>Hyperboreal</i>	239
Joan Naviyuk Kane / “ <i>On Either Side</i> ”	245
Joan Naviyuk Kane / “ <i>Innate</i> ”	246
Pablo Neruda: Themes / Worldview / Context	247
Pablo Neruda: Solitude and Solidarity in “<i>Nothing More</i>”	250
Pablo Neruda / “ <i>Nothing More</i> ”	255
Pablo Neruda / “ <i>Too Many Names</i> ”	256
Wisława Szymborska: Themes / Worldview / Context	258
Wisława Szymborska / “ <i>Some Like Poetry</i> ”	262
Wisława Szymborska / “ <i>The Century’s Decline</i> ”	263
Wisława Szymborska / “ <i>True Love</i> ”	265

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Else Lasker-Schüler: Themes / Worldview / Context	267
Else Lasker-Schüler / “ <i>My Blue Piano</i> ”	272
Else Lasker-Schüler / “ <i>Autumn</i> ”	273
Else Lasker-Schüler / “ <i>I Know</i> ”	274
Else Lasker-Schüler / “ <i>A Single Man</i> ”	275
 Po-Chü-I: Themes / Worldview / Context	276
Po-Chü-I / “ <i>To My Brothers and Sisters Adrift in Troubled Times</i> <i>This Poem of the Moon</i> ”	278
 Aimé Césaire: Themes / Worldview / Context	279
Césaire / from <i>Notebook of a Return to the Native Land</i>	284
 Appendix A. Guides for Reflection	289
 Unit I. Short Fiction from the East	
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>Exercise Book</i> ”	290
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>Profit and Loss</i> ”	291
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>The Postmaster</i> ”	292
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>Fury Appeased</i> ”	294
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>The Conclusion</i> ”	295
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>The Wife’s Letter</i> ”	296
• Guide for Reflection: Tagore / “ <i>East and West</i> ”	297
 Unit II. Drama from the East	
• Guide for Reflection: <i>Bodhisattva: A Play 1949</i> / Act I	299
• Guide for Reflection: <i>Bodhisattva: A Play 1949</i> / Act II	302
• Guide for Reflection: <i>Bodhisattva: A Play 1949</i> / Act III	304
• Guide for Reflection: <i>Bodhisattva: A Play 1949</i> / Act IV	306
 Unit III. Short Fiction from the West	
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Vanka</i> ”	308
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Sleepy</i> ”	310
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Anyuta</i> ”	311
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Misery</i> ”	312
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Home</i> ”	313
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Gooseberries</i> ”	314
• Guide for Reflection: Chekhov / “ <i>Betrothed</i> ”	315
 Appendix B. Film Suggestions	317
 Glossary for Tagore Readings	319
 Permissions	325

Worldviews in Literature: Preface



Authors and works in this world literature anthology represent a collective commitment to enlightened perspectives of society and the world. The essays of Rabindranath Tagore, poet and Nobel laureate from India, guided the book's development, shaped its ethos, and clarified its organization. Tagore's ideas have influenced the book's approach in several ways. The first is through Tagore's suggestion in his essay "An Eastern University" that the world's overriding problem is a need for people of all nations to realize they belong to a single country: the earth. It is imperative, Tagore states, for humankind to realize a greater unity than at any previous time. The first step toward this unity is "creating opportunities to reveal cultures to one another."¹

Now the problem is of one single country which is the earth. Mankind must realize a unity wider in range and deeper in sentiment, stronger in power than ever before. The first step, is creating opportunities for revealing the different peoples to one another...²

In his essay "World Literature" Tagore explains how literature serves this greater unity and also reveals people and cultures to one another. What is truly worth seeing in world literature, according to Tagore, is the way it reveals universal humanity through its diversity of expression.³

We have to regard literature as a temple built by the master mason, universal man; writers from various countries and periods are working under him as laborers.⁴...Our goal is to view universal humanity in universal literature.⁵

Tagore's warning about the need for a more powerful unity, his perspective that people of all nations belong to a single country, the earth, and his vision of world literature revealing universal humanity aligns with recent United Nations initiatives. Tagore's ideas gain currency on the eve of a United Nations call for a first-ever World Humanitarian Summit. An announcement for the Summit reads, "The challenges and demands of the 21st century are global issues that require global solutions...to the great challenges we face now and in the future...to reduce human loss and suffering from crises."⁶ According to UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon, "We must aim high. Along with the World Humanitarian Summit is an opportunity to align major global commitments to support the world's most vulnerable people."⁷ The Summit intends to "re-inspire and re-invigorate the world with the fundamental tenets of humanitarian work...It must be a global rallying call for humanity."⁸

Worldviews in Literature also links with another recent UNESCO project: "Tagore, Neruda and Césaire for a Reconciled Universal." UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova's address "Three Unifying Messages for a New Humanism"⁹ calls for worldwide study and reflection on themes in the poets' works. Her address states that world poets "Rabindranath Tagore, Pablo Neruda, and Aimé Césaire are powerful guides that illumine current questions and nourish the contemporary humanist project."¹⁰

In addition to these three poets, *Worldviews in Literature* includes other authors and poets who have also dedicated their life work to greater unity and humanitarian concerns and have brought light in times of their countries' darkest hours. The book also has a spiritual dimension as it includes a play by the Buddhist scholar, Dharmanand Kosambi, who was profoundly committed to enduring peace among India's diverse communities following independence and into its future. Tagore's essay "East and West," also included here, sets forth a guide for peace and cooperation on a global scale. His essay provides the framework for the anthology's organization of literature along an East-West continuum.

Features

Worldviews in Literature, organized by genres, provides thirty-nine readings organized into two units of short fiction, one unit of drama, and one unit of poetry with an emphasis on women poets. Selections within each unit are thematically linked, and units are linked across genres. The book includes three main authors and provides enough of their literature so that readers see how authors' themes, arguments, and perspectives evolve into worldviews. The anthology also includes thirteen poets and over twenty poems. "Themes and Worldview" essays introduce each of the anthology's fifteen authors and provide social and historical context for their works. Four poetry essays provide additional commentary on the poems. The anthology includes an appendix, "Guides for Reflection," with questions that assist readers explore selections in greater depth. A second appendix includes film suggestions for each unit.

The book's Table of Contents could serve as a syllabus for a world literature course. Fiction readings build in length as they are listed. Each fiction unit includes two longer works that appear last in the readings. The sequence of short to longer works enables readers to approach longer works with a prior understanding of authors' themes and perspectives. In addition, readings in the first fiction unit introduce themes in the second drama unit. The essay "Tagore, Kosambi, and Bengal Renaissance Values" provides additional context for the first two units and ways in which they converge.

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1. Rabindranath Tagore, "An Eastern University," *Creative Unity* in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, vol. 2, ed. Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2011), p. 556.
2. Ibid.
3. Rabindranath Tagore, "World Literature," *Selected Writings on Language and Literature*, eds. Sukanata Chaudhuri, Sankha Ghosh, and introduction by Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), p. 148.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. "World Humanitarian Summit, Istanbul, May 26-27, 2016." Web.
7. Ban-Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, "Statement: Secretary-General's Remarks to Member States Briefing on the World Humanitarian Summit" (United Nations: New York, April 20, 2015). Web.
8. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, "Closing Remarks to the Global Forum on Improving Humanitarian Action" (United Nations: New York, 5 June, 2015). Web.
9. Irina Bokova, "Three Unifying Messages" in *Tagore, Neruda, Césaire for a Reconciled Universal*, (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011), p. 19.
10. Ibid.

WORLD LITERATURE AND THE HUMANITIES

Worldviews in Literature: Introduction



Authors in this anthology have written some of the world's most memorable literature in the genres of fiction, drama, and poetry. Among fifteen authors included here, four are Nobel laureates in literature: Rabindranath Tagore from India, Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda from Chile, and Wisława Szymborska from Poland. Anton Chekhov received Russia's highest literary award, The Pushkin Prize for his fiction. Additionally, authors gathered here have enriched world culture through their humanistic works, writing, and worldviews. Russian poet Osip Mandelstam envisioned a "return to humanism"¹ as a vital direction for the modern world.² In the essay "World Literature," Rabindranath Tagore affirmed this same direction.³ In addition, a recent United Nations / UNESCO global project emphasizes a "reconciled universal" perspective or "new humanism" in works of three poets: Tagore, Neruda, and Césaire whose works are included here. This anthology follows Mandelstam's, Tagore's, and UNESCO's directives in its focus on Eastern and Western literature that shares humanistic themes, values, perspectives, and worldviews across historic, geographic, and cultural divides.

Education is an example of a universal theme across national literatures that appears in *Worldviews in Literature* selections. The shared theme of education is vital to all authors in this anthology and runs like a silver thread through their lives and works. Tagore established a school in

Santiniketan, India that evolved into a global university and Rural Reconstruction Institute. Tagore's educational philosophy remains an important part of India's cultural heritage. Tagore believed that "all human problems such as poverty, religious discord, and disunity would find their resolution in education."⁴ Russian writer Anton Chekhov, also a physician, helped to build schools, endow libraries, and support women's education.⁵ The Buddhist scholar Dharmanand Kosambi, whose play appears in the anthology, was a strong supporter of India's first university for women and widows and also attempted to build a school for young women in India. Gabriela Mistral, poet and diplomat, helped to improve and extend education in South America and was an advocate for educational reform throughout the Americas. Pablo Neruda, poet and senator, worked to improve education and labor conditions in Chile and South America as well.

Readings in *Worldviews in Literature* are organized into four units.

- ❖ **Unit I: Short Fiction from the East** includes six short stories and an essay by Tagore.
- ❖ **Unit II: Short Fiction from the West** includes seven short stories by Chekhov.
- ❖ **Unit III: Drama from the East** includes a complete four-act play by Kosambi.
- ❖ **Unit IV: World Poets East and West** includes thirteen poets and twenty-four poems from Asia, the Middle East, South America, Europe, and Africa. A substantial excerpt from Césaire's book-length poem *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* is also included.

Authors' works included here provide insight into the societies and eras in which they lived. In addition, this literature has assisted writers to develop worldviews that have in turn led them to serve society and contribute to its renewal and improvement. This may be, after all, what unites these Eastern and Western writers most permanently: a desire to contribute to and enhance civic life and to nourish, preserve, and honor the strands of cultural life that bind together and create its fabric.

Fiction East and West

The choice to include Rabindranath Tagore to represent short fiction from the East and Anton Chekhov to represent short fiction from the West is based in part on Sankar Basu's book *Chekhov and Tagore: A Comparative Study* which traces similar themes, cultural and historical contexts, and values of Tagore and Chekhov, who were born respectively in 1861 and 1860. Stylistically the authors share much in common. In addition, Tagore and Chekhov's worldwide reception and influence is extensive and enduring. The recent UNESCO project is an example of Tagore's continuing relevance as a world leader and thinker and his importance to both world literature and the humanities. Another example is a recent book, *Rabindranath Tagore: One Hundred Years of Global Reception*. In addition, Cornell West's statement praising Chekhov's literary works and relevance also demonstrates Chekhov's current significance to world literature and the humanities.

I find the incomparable works of Anton Chekhov — the best singular body by a modern artist — to be the wisest and deepest interpretations of what human beings confront in their daily struggles.⁶

Chekhov's values are centrally located in European Enlightenment thinking. According to Isaiah Berlin, Chekhov is considered an important member of the Russian Enlightenment, which derived its impetus from the European Enlightenment.⁷ It is helpful to read Tagore and Chekhov together as their works illuminate comparative historical, cultural, and social contexts in both India and Russia.

Drama from the East

The drama unit makes this book unique as a world literature and humanities text. The anthology includes a work of literature by a Buddhist scholar from India that is virtually unknown in the Western world. Dharmanand Kosambi's *Bodhisattva: A Play, 1949* is both a literary work and a philosophical text that provides an introduction to a Buddhist worldview.

In 2010 Meera Kosambi, feminist scholar and granddaughter of Dharmanand Kosambi, translated the play into English from its original Marathi language. She gave the contemporary English-speaking world a priceless gift before she passed away in 2015. Dharmanand Kosambi's complete drama *Bodhisattva: A Play, 1949* appears here in Meera Kosambi's English translation and provides an introduction to drama, the humanities, and Eastern philosophy together in one comprehensive literary work. Written in a clear, accessible style and based on authoritative Pāli texts, the play provides one of the most accurate historical records of the Buddha's life available. In India, the play is considered a "literary masterpiece in its own right."⁸

Two well-known works of world literature, among others, introduced the Western literary world to the life of the Buddha and Eastern philosophy: Sir Edward Arnold's "The Light of Asia," a popular English verse depiction of the Buddha's life; and Herman Hesse's novel, *Siddhartha*. Dharmanand Kosambi's play adds an historical dimension to literature about the Buddha's life and includes his role of reformer⁹ and negotiator between feuding communities. Dharmanand Kosambi, who lived many years at Gandhi's ashram, may have intended the play to be a guide for communal peace between the new nations of India and Pakistan in 1949.

World Poets: East and West

Worldviews in Literature provides a unique selection of women poets from the East and West whose poems illuminate current world events and humanitarian issues. This section provides Eastern perspectives from poet and playwright Nathalie Handal, originally from Palestine, now living in New York and currently a professor at Columbia University. In addition to her poems and plays, Handal edited the groundbreaking book *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, introducing many Arab women's voices to the Western literary world. She also co-edited the landmark book *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia and Beyond* along with Tina Chang and Ravi Shankar. Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer called the book "a beautiful achievement for world literature."¹⁰ In her forward to the book, Carolyn Forché says it is "a field guide to the human condition in our time and a poetic survival manual."¹¹ Handal's own poems included here from her recent book *Poet*

in *Andalucía* based on the life of Federico García Lorca provide a humanistic worldview and insight into the plight of refugees and their longing for safety, shelter, and sanctuary in a world torn by war and religious intolerance. *Worldviews in Literature* also includes lyrical poetry by the famous Vietnamese poet Xuân Quỳnh, translated by Carolyn Forché, poet, human rights advocate, and director of the Lannan Foundation for Poetics and Social Practice.

Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral's poems included here provide Western perspectives on postcolonial Latin America and indigenous Indian populations in South America. Mistral's poems link with those of Native American poet Joan Naviyuk Kane whose poems in *Worldviews* provide Western cultural and ecological perspectives. Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska's poems and German poet Else Lasker-Schüler's poems translated by Eavan Boland, poet and Stanford University humanities professor, provide historical context and perspectives on postwar Europe. Eavan Boland has also written about Lasker-Schüler and other German women poets in an important book on women's survival and perceptions after war entitled *After Every War: Twentieth Century Women Poets*. She also translated Lasker-Schüler's last book of poems *Mein Blaue Klavier (My Blue Piano)* into English. Four of Boland's translations from Lasker-Schüler's book appear in *Worldviews*.

Just as this anthology provides a view of the Eastern cultural heritage, it also includes a view of Western spiritual and ecological heritage preserved in the poetry of Joan Naviyuk Kane from the Alaskan Inuit tribe. Naviyuk Kane's poetry preserves a vital linguistic and cultural identity and wisdom.¹² In addition, the World Poets section also explores loss and recovery of cultural identity as a universal theme across national literatures. Additionally, the book also considers World Poets East and West in light of six UNESCO "themes for a new humanism" listed below. Poets from the East include Nathalie Handal, Diana Der-Hovanessian, Xuân Quỳnh, Jon Pineda, Pak Chaesam, and Po-Chü-I. Poets of the West include Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Joan Naviyuk Kane, Wisława Szymborska, and Else Lasker-Schüler. The poetry of Aimé Césaire from Martinique, provides a bridge between the East and West.

United Nations / UNESCO Themes

Six themes that appear in two United Nations / UNESCO global projects also appear in works of authors and poets in *Worldviews*. The first global project “Tagore, Neruda, Césaire for a Reconciled Universal” was created “to inspire reflection in academic and artistic communities on universal values of human society.”¹³ The project identifies five themes that serve as a foundation for a new humanism and are reflected in works in *Worldviews*. The list that follows includes five UNESCO themes and *Worldviews* authors who address or provide perspectives on these themes.

The second UNESCO project: “International Women’s Day: Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality” highlights themes of women’s empowerment, equality, and contributions to world culture. This theme is central to *Worldviews*. Tagore and Chekhov’s stories along with Kosambi’s play in *Worldviews* illustrate another “universal theme across national literatures”: shared support and advocacy of women’s equality, rights, and education. Additionally this central theme appears in the work of women world poets in *Worldviews*. Suggested films related to these UNESCO themes are also included in the list below.

UNESCO theme 1: Authors as agents of social change¹⁴

- ❖ *Worldviews* authors illustrating this theme: Tagore, Chekhov, Kosambi, and World Poets in Unit IV.
- ❖ *Worldviews* suggested films on theme: *Gandhi*, *Life Is Beautiful*, *El Norte*, *Children of Heaven*, *The Burmese Harp*

UNESCO theme 2: Creating beneficial relationships between humanity and nature¹⁵

- ❖ *Worldviews* authors illustrating this theme: Tagore, Chekhov, Naviyuk Kane, Mistral, Neruda, Szymborska, Xuân Quỳnh, Po-Chü-I
- ❖ *Worldviews* suggested film on theme: *Scent of Green Papaya*

UNESCO theme 3: Liberty: emancipation from all forms of oppression¹⁶

- ❖ *Worldviews* authors illustrating this theme: Tagore, Chekhov, Kosambi, and all “World Poets”
- ❖ *Worldviews* suggested films on theme: *Gandhi*, *Life Is Beautiful*, *El Norte*, *The Burmese Harp*

UNESCO theme 4: The relationships between science, knowledge, and ethics¹⁷

- ❖ *Worldviews* authors on this theme: Tagore (essay), Chekhov, Szymborska
- ❖ *Worldviews* suggested film on theme: *Maria Skłodowska-Curie*

UNESCO theme 5: Education as a primary value and heritage¹⁸

- ❖ All *Worldviews* authors adopt this focus in their lives and works. The theme appears in Tagore, Chekhov, Kosambi, Szymborska.
- ❖ *Worldviews* suggested films on theme: *Children of Heaven*, *Scent of Green Papaya*

UNESCO theme 6: Women's empowerment, equality, and contributions to world culture

- ❖ *Worldviews* authors illustrating this theme: Tagore, Chekhov, Kosambi, Handal, Der-Hovanesian, Xuân Quỳnh, Pak Chasam, Jon Pineda, Mistral, Szymborska, Lasker-Schüler
- Worldviews suggested film on theme: *Maria Skłodowska-Curie*

Films

The Appendix of suggested films relates to themes and literature in each unit's selections. These films provide historical, sociopolitical, and cultural context for reading selections and add visual dimension and depth to the book's thematic content. In addition, these films are important links between readings and UNESCO themes. Viewing these films enriches readers' understanding of the literature and historical periods in which the literature was written. Additionally these films also enable readers to view the landscape and societies in countries where the literature originated.

1. Osip Mandelstam, "Humanism and the Present," *Osip Mandelstam: Complete Critical Prose* tr. Jane Gray Harris (Dana Point, CA: Ardis Publisher, 1997), p. 115.
2. Ibid.
3. Rabindranath Tagore, "World Literature," *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Language and Literature*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri and Sangha Ghose (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 148.
4. Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 23.
5. Simon Karlinsky, *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 26.
6. Cornell West, *The Cornell West Reader*, pp. xv-xvi quoted in Walter Moss, "Chekhov for our Times," *George Mason University History News Network*, November, 28, 2010. Web.
7. Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 144.
8. Dhurb Kumar Singh, "Review of Dharmanand Kosambi: *The Essential Writings*," *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 113.
9. Meera Kosambi, *Dharmanand Kosambi: The Essential Writings* (New Delhi: Permanent Black), p. 36.
10. Interboard Poetry Community (IBPC) Oct-Dec. 2011. Web.
11. Caroline Forché, "Forward" *Language for a New Country*, ed. Tina Chang. Nathalie Handal, Ravi Shankar (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), p. xxxiii.
12. Melissa Block, "Ghost Island Looms Large Among Displaced Inupiat Eskimos," NPR Interview Highlights with Joan Naviyuk Kane, June 21, 2013. Web.
13. "Universal Thought of Tagore, Neruda, Césaire: Poetry in Service of a New Humanism," *The UNESCO Courier*, June 23, 2011.
14. *Rabindranath Tagore, Pablo Neruda, and Aime Césaire for a Reconciled Universal* (Paris: UNESCO, 2011), p. 23.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.

I



Short Fiction from the East

THEMES AND WORLDVIEW

Rabindranath Tagore
India (1861–1941)



Although we are familiar with Mahatma Gandhi from India, his compatriot Rabindranath Tagore is less familiar to us in the West. Tagore as poet and educator became the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in literature. In addition, Tagore's educational philosophy along with his global university, Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan, India, helped to establish the foundation of India's current educational system.

After receiving the Nobel Prize in 1913, Tagore's travels to the West "convinced him of a need for worldwide cooperation"¹ prior to World War I. Tagore's hope was that his university would "build a bridge between nations."² According to Tagore biographer, Uma Das Gupta,

It was Tagore's immense service to India, as it has been Gandhi's in a different plane, that he forced the people in some measure out of their narrow grooves of thought and made them think of broader issues affecting humanity.³

In terms of Tagore's vision, his grand project and worldview embodied in his university and literature was "to bring the East and West together and make them jointly work for world peace and for a more just, more humane, more spiritual society."⁴ Additionally Tagore's objective for his uni-

versity was to unify India and bring cultural understanding through closer ties between India's urban and rural residents through education.⁵

During British rule in India, Tagore's literature and educational institutions became vital contributions to India's awakening. Tagore's works helped to unite the country, renew India's cultural identity, and strengthen the foundations of its sovereignty. In her book *Righteous Republic: the Political Foundations of Modern India*, author Ananya Vajpeyi indicates that among those who stand out in the struggle for India's political sovereignty, Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) is first among equals: Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956).⁶

Gandhi and Tagore carried on a lifelong correspondence. As a result of their first exchange of letters, Tagore agreed to take in Gandhi's young South African students and educate them at his school in Santiniketan, India. Tagore's hospitality and assistance to Gandhi and his students in their first meeting at Santiniketan created a lifelong friendship between them. Later, during a crisis for Tagore's university, Visva-Bharati, Gandhi helped Tagore raise funds and provided vital support for the institution.⁷ Near the time of his death Tagore requested that Gandhi become a life trustee of the university. "Accept this institution under your protection...Visva-Bharati is like a vessel...carrying the cargo of my life's best treasures... I hope it may claim special care from my countrymen for its preservation."⁸

Tagore often referred to Gandhi as "Mahatma" meaning "Great Soul" for bringing to light the needs of India's invisible poor in 700,000 villages and for making "nonviolence the true creed of the brave."⁹ In turn, Gandhi named Tagore "Great Sentinel." "I regard the poet as a sentinel warning us against the approach of enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance, and Inertia and other members of that brood."¹⁰

The correspondence and dialogue between Gandhi and Tagore in their public debates are models of critical thinking and democratic exchange. According to Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in his the book, *The Mahatma and the Poet*, "On many occasions Gandhi sought Tagore's advice before launching on a major course of action."¹¹

The most remarkable thing about the intellectual exchange between Gandhi and Tagore is...the extent to which each of them – one holding the highest degree of political power in the sub-continent and the other at the

pinnacle of intellectual eminence – was willing to learn from each other.”¹²

While Gandhi united the country politically and religiously, Tagore unified the country through education, culture, and restoration of rural economies.¹³ Tagore believed that human education... “is a great movement of universal cooperation inter-linked by different ages and countries” that has as its ultimate purpose the discovery... of unity.¹⁴ Tagore wrote that education creates an obligation to contribute “to the light of the consciousness, that comprehends all humanity.”¹⁵

Tagore promoted education for women at a time when many in India’s society did not see the value in educating young women. Girls married off as child brides often “disappeared” into their husband’s homes where they became shadow figures. Some of Tagore’s stories that address this theme are “Exercise Book,” “The Postmaster,” “Profit and Loss,” and “The Wife’s Letter.” Tagore’s literature also contributed to India’s awakening by fostering critical, independent thought and through it the empowerment of women. Stories on these related themes are “The Conclusion,” “Fury Appeased,” and “The Wife’s Letter.” Additionally Tagore’s literature attempted to raise awareness of and also to mend social divisions between urban and rural populations and also to remove caste distinctions. His stories “The Conclusion,” “The Postmaster,” and his essay “East and West” address these themes. Another key to Tagore’s literature is his exploration of the destructive effects of feudal customs. The stories “Profit and Loss,” “The Wife’s Letter,” and his essay “East and West” underscore this theme as well. Tagore’s aim in his literature was to foster enlightened and beneficial social values and practices. Overall, Tagore’s writings and contributions helped to restore a sense of dignity and pride in India’s heritage in the wake of British rule. Tagore’s literary and life work follow the path of social, cultural, and spiritual renewal established by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1830 that led to creation of the Indian National Congress and eventually to India’s nationhood.¹⁶

Tagore’s literature and worldview draw on both Eastern and Western intellectual traditions, blending modern reformist ideals such as liberty, equality, and fraternity with ancient wisdom in India’s sacred texts. According to Uma Das Gupta, Tagore’s “restoration of the Upanishadic perception of one world as a dominant ideology... was one of the most important contributions Tagore made to contemporary culture in twentieth century Bengal and India.”¹⁷

While Tagore encourages exchange between the East and West in his global university, he also calls both civilizations to account in a valuable critique of their strengths and weaknesses in his essay “East and West.” At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of sympathy for those who are impoverished, powerless, or invisible in society. In addition, Tagore also advocates ideals that will raise society from servitude and strengthen it from within. Both through example and persuasion, Tagore directs India to unite in humanitarian and civic works that will contribute to the welfare of India and the world.

1. Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 30.
2. *Ibid.*, 30.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 373.
4. *Rabindranath Tagore: One Hundred Years of Global Reception*, eds. Martin Kämpchen and Imre Bangha, editorial advisor Uma Das Gupta (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2014), p. xi.
5. Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 23.
6. Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. x.
7. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941* (New Delhi: The National Book Trust, 2008), p.19.
8. *Ibid.*, 20.
9. *Ibid.*, 170.
10. *Rabindranath Tagore, An Anthology* ed. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (New York: St. Martin Griffin, 1997), pp. 2, 3.
11. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941* (New Delhi: The National Book Trust, 2008), p.13.
12. *Ibid.*, 21.
13. Uma Das Gupta, “In Pursuit of a Different Freedom: Tagore’s World University at Santiniketan” *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3/ 4, p. 25.
14. Rabindranath Tagore, “Ideals of Education” in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol. 4* ed. Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2012), p. 612.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 613.
16. B.P. Singh, *The Indian National Congress and Cultural Renaissance* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1987), p. 14.
17. Uma Das Gupta, “In Pursuit of a Different Freedom: Tagore’s World University at Santiniketan” *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3/ 4, p. 25.

BENGAL RENAISSANCE VALUES

Tagore, Kosambi, and the Bengal Renaissance



The writings and worldviews of Rabindranath Tagore and Dharmanand Kosambi are linked through a cultural renewal and awakening in India called the Bengal Renaissance. Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) initiated the Renaissance which uplifted and released India from “medieval decadence” and inspired change in the “literary, cultural, social, and economic aspirations of Bengalis.”¹ In addition, Rammohan Roy created a religious reform movement, Brahmo Samaj which discarded ritualistic practices from the orthodox Hindu religion.² The Bengal Renaissance strengthened India from within, renewing cultural pride, and helping India recover from cultural suppression and inferiority arising from British colonial rule and exploitation considered “a necessary part of the colonial commitment.”³ Tagore enhanced and instated the Renaissance in the minds and hearts of India through his literary and artistic works and educational institutions. Dharmanand Kosambi deepened the significance and breadth of the Renaissance by introducing historical aspects of the Buddha’s life and teaching into India’s spiritual and cultural heritage. Based on these contributions, Gandhi invited Dharmanand Kosambi to his ashram community to live and teach.⁴

The Bengal Renaissance had a threefold purpose. The first was to reform India’s oppressive feudal customs and superstitions initially supported by religious orthodoxy in order to transform India into a more enlightened society. India’s feudal customs of the caste system, a rigid dis-

criminatory classification system based on birth, along with customs of child marriage, dowry, and the burning of widows or “sati” are examples. Gandhi gave Tagore the name “Great Sentinel” for warning India against attitudes that supported, gave rise to, and perpetuated feudal customs.⁵ Tracing Tagore’s role as “Great Sentinel” in his stories is an important key to understanding Tagore’s literature and worldview.

A second aspect of the Bengal Renaissance was to strengthen India’s cultural identity which British economic, social, and political rule had suppressed. For instance, in 1877 Queen Victoria was made empress of all of India as a way to unite India behind a British raj or ruler. The Renaissance renewed India’s cultural identity through a rediscovery and reintroduction of India’s own philosophical and spiritual heritage and traditions that were life-giving and beneficial for the society but which had become lost in the process of India’s assimilation of British and Western culture. Tagore’s literature and essays were central to this second aspect of the Renaissance. Dharmanand Kosambi’s research, writings, and play *Bodhisattva: A Play* 1949 were also significant contributions to this aspect of the Bengal Renaissance in their historical research and translation of original Pali texts on the Buddha’s life and teachings. Gotama Buddha⁶ was born in northern India, now Nepal, and the religion originated there but was dying out in India and had few adherents in the early nineteenth century. Kosambi’s research and writing helped to create a resurgence of interest in Buddhism in India’s society, strengthened cultural identity, and inspired greater commitment to reform. Just as Ram Mohan Roy reformed and clarified the Hindu religion through the Brahmo Samaj movement, so Dharmanand Kosambi’s research and writings clarified the historical life of the Buddha and became a new, contemporary approach to the Buddha’s life and teachings. Kakasaheb Kalelkar in the preface to *Bodhisattva: A Play* 1949 says about Dharmanand Kosambi, “All his life he spoke and wrote not a sentence without strong historical evidence.”⁷ Meera Kosambi in her introduction to *Dharmanand Kosambi: The Essential Writing* further elucidates this point. “The heart of the matter, according to Kalelkar is that the Buddha’s subsequent philosophical search and discovery were related to the alleviation of not merely physical suffering, but also of social ailments.”⁸ It is on this ground, the attempt to alleviate suffering due to social evils that the life work and literature of Tagore and Kosambi converge. This point is central to the Bengal Renaissance.

Kosambi’s writings inspired Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a leading political figure in India, to adopt the Buddha’s teachings as a model and ground for an enlightened, equitable society. Dr. Ambedkar, who helped to write India’s constitution and became a leading voice and advocate for the Dalit com-

munity of 400,000, urged his followers to convert to Buddhism. Kosambi's research on the Buddha's teachings and particularly his play *Bodhisattva* on the Buddha's life became central to Ambedkar's interpretation of the Buddha as a social reformer. This has recently been documented in the critical edition of Dr. Ambedkar's book *The Buddha and His Dharma*.⁹

In terms of alleviating social evils, the first purpose of the Bengal Renaissance was to remove destructive social customs and superstitions and to replace them with constructive life-affirming values and practices such as education, women's empowerment, and critical thinking. The second purpose of the Bengal Renaissance was to unify, renew, and strengthen India's social and civic life through a celebration of India's cultural identity and spiritual heritage. A third aspect of the Bengal Renaissance was the concept of swaraj: self-mastery, self-rule, or self-reliance, independence, or home-rule. This concept further strengthened India's society through its emphasis on awareness, discipline, nonviolence, equality, and contributions to society. The political center of pre-independence India, the Indian National Congress, adopted this enlightened program of cultural renewal and awakening and set it as a primary agenda thus grounding political action in social reform, a renewed and strengthened social identity, independence, and improvement of society. Tagore's literature and Kosambi's play strengthened the Bengal Renaissance and furthered India's evolution as a nation. Identifying aspects of the Bengal Renaissance in their literature will clarify both Tagore and Kosambi's worldviews.

1. Rabindranath Tagore: *One Hundred Years of Global Reception*, eds. Martin Kämpchen, Imre Bangha, and editorial advisor Uma Das Gupta (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2014), p. 509.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 510.
4. Meera Kosambi, *Dharmanand Kosambi: The Essential Writings* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), p. 25.
5. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941* (New Delhi: The National Book Trust, 2008), p. 88.
6. Kosambi uses the Pāli spelling of "Gotama" Buddha in his writings rather than the more well-known "Gautama" spelling.
7. Meera Kosambi. *Dharmanand Kosambi: The Essential Writings* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), p. 36.
8. Ibid., 36.
9. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dharma*, critical edition ed. Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 31, 32, 40.